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First Committee

10 October 2006

Thematic Debate: Nuclear

Statement by HE Ms Caroline Millar Ambassador for Disarmament and Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations, Geneva

(Check against delivery)

Madam Chair

This First Committee debate on nuclear issues takes place at a crucial time.

North Korea's announcement that it conducted a nuclear test on 9 October is a grave threat to international peace and security particularly for Northeast Asia.

North Korea's actions are unacceptable and Australia condemns them unreservedly and in the strongest possible terms.

This provocation will only serve to raise tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

It is totally at odds with Pyongyang's oft-stated claim that it seeks a de-nuclearised Korean peninsula.

And it sets back efforts to resolve peacefully the threat to peace and stability posed by North Korea's nuclear weapons program.

North Korea should abandon its nuclear weapons and its nuclear weapons programs, return immediately and unconditionally to the six-party talks and honour and implement its commitment under the September 2005 Joint Statement to return to the NPT and to IAEA safeguards at an early date.

Australia calls upon the international community to support a unified and strong response to North Korea's actions, and to encourage North Korea to become a responsible member of the international community.

Madam Chair

North Korea's actions underscore the urgent need for entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.

Australia takes great pride in introducing the CTBT resolution to the First Committee in this the tenth anniversary of the treaty's opening for signature.

Australia led international action to bring the CTBT to the UN where it was adopted by an overwhelming majority of states in 1996.

Since then, the treaty has established a norm against nuclear testing. But still further signings and ratifications are required to lock in this norm for all time.

The central message of this year's resolution is to urge all states to sign and ratify the treaty, in particular those states whose ratification is required for its entry into force.

We urge maintenance of test moratoriums and call on all states to refrain from actions that would defeat the objective of the treaty.

The resolution also reaffirms the vital need to continue work on building the verification regime that will enable verification of compliance with the treaty.

Australia urges all states to support this resolution.

Madam Chair

The lack of a fissile material cut-off treaty remains a significant shortcoming in the international community's nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament efforts.

It is difficult to conceive of lasting nuclear disarmament without the assurance that states will not revert to fissile material production.

Thus a key objective of all states committed to the goal of nuclear disarmament should be to conclude a treaty that secures the commitment of states parties to end fissile material production for nuclear weapons.

Australia shares the frustration of many with the lack of progress toward an FMCT within the Conference on Disarmament over the past few years.

For this reason, we were greatly encouraged by the thematic debate on an FMCT in the CD in May this year. It was clear from the debate that support for an FMCT is strong.

Of particular significance, was the tabling of a draft treaty and negotiating mandate by the United States.

As a supporter of an FMCT that provides for appropriate measures to verify compliance, Australia considers the draft US mandate as providing a basis for moving forward to negotiation of such an FMCT.

Moreover, the mandate is without prejudice to work that might be undertaken on other issues on the CD's agenda.

Accordingly, Australia urges states to redouble efforts towards finding a pragmatic solution to the impasse that has beset the CD for a decade, thereby building on the encouraging progress under the six presidents' initiative of this year.

Thank you, Madam Chair.